

**Lieutenant-Governor
John Graves Simcoe
1752-1806**

John Graves Simcoe was the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada (now Ontario), and initially reached North America as a British army captain in 1775. Despatched to Boston at the outbreak of the American War of Independence, Captain Simcoe saw considerable military action before he was wounded at the Battle of Brandywine. Subsequently, he was given command of the Queen's Rangers, a corps of Loyalists recruited within the American colonies.

His father, Navy Captain John Simcoe (1710-1759), commander of the "Pembroke", a 60-gun British frigate, had died of pneumonia on board ship off Anticosti Island on his way to Quebec, just prior to that colony's decisive fall to the British in 1759. Master of the shipboard expedition was James Cook, later famed for South Pacific exploration, who attributed his knowledge of seamanship and navigation to the elder Simcoe. In 1752, Captain Simcoe had published *Maxims of Conduct*, a training manual for Royal Navy officers which remained in official use for the next 100 years.



When, in 1791, John Graves Simcoe was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the newly-created province of Upper Canada, he was residing in Devonshire, Southern England, representing a local constituency as Member of Parliament. His wife, Elizabeth Posthuma (so named because she was born after her father's death) had, in 1784, purchased Wolford Estate in Devonshire. There the Simcoes built Wolford Lodge, and, in 1802, Wolford Chapel. Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. Simcoe sailed for Canada in September, 1791, and by the following summer had established Upper Canada's first capital at *Newark* (now Niagara-on-the-Lake), an arrival point for the many United Empire Loyalists who, in fleeing the American colonies, were to populate much of Upper Canada.

When, by 1793, the Loyalist influx had subsided and Newark was threatened with border skirmishes, Simcoe considered moving the capital to Upper Canada's *London* (which he had named) but decided on the more accessible site of Toronto, which he renamed *York*. This city, which resumed the name *Toronto* in 1834, remains the province's capital.

No mere figurehead of colonial government, this dedicated leader immersed himself in the rapid development of Upper Canada – a broad wilderness populated by less than 10,000 citizens.

Simcoe set about to attract pioneering settlers to the area through land grants and financial assistance; to integrate the Indians into a stable way of life by organizing them into Council-administered bands and into an Indian militia, commanded by their own people, and to restrict negro slavery with a view to its abolition. He facilitated transportation by constructing such major roads as Yonge Street, leading north from York to Lake Simcoe (which he named after his father) and Dundas Street running west from York to London and he fostered the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes system as a trade route.

Simcoe enforced the law-and-order and parliamentary systems of the mother country, still used in Ontario today; promoted trade with England and the United States by exporting timber in return for the many products required to develop the colony; ensured an educated body of colonists by bringing in highly qualified teachers; the first of whom were established in Kingston, offering intensive 2-year immersion programs; and took steps to standardize the colony's currency.

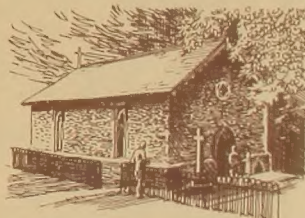
In his role, the Lieutenant-Governor was assisted by his wife, Elizabeth, who combined a keen intelligence with a strong sense of tradition and humanity.

A shrewd observer of people and events, Mrs. Simcoe left us her diary, a valuable social history of early Ontario,

and a number of well-executed paintings of the Canadian landscape, now in the Archives of Ontario. Her sensitivity to the harsh effects of pioneer life on soldiers and settlers alike led her to maintain, as best she could, the social customs and civilities she had known in her homeland.

In 1796, the Simcoes returned to England. Seemingly his arduous duties, extensive travels in the wilderness, primitive living conditions and severity of climate had contributed to Simcoe's declining health. However, during the next ten years he took part in a number of military and diplomatic endeavours unconnected with Canada. John Graves Simcoe died in 1806, at Exeter in Devon, England, shortly after being named Commander-in-Chief of India, a post he was never able to assume. He was 54.

John Graves Simcoe was buried in Wolford Chapel on the family estate. His wife, who died in 1850, at the age of 84, and five of their eleven children are also interred there.





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Wolford Chapel

Wolford Chapel was built by General and Mrs. Simcoe in 1802. It occupies a fenced-in plot approximately 88 feet long by 65 feet wide and is thought to have been erected on the foundations of an ancient abbey. Memorial plaques have been inserted, near the base of the east and south side, to General Simcoe, his wife and five of their children.

The font and the altar, circa 1802, are carved of white "free-stone", decorated in part with a grapevine motif similar to that found in the neighbouring Lupitt chapel.

The baptistry, located behind the font, is a fine example of Jacobean workmanship, incorporating the Diocesan arms of Exeter.

Rear altar panelling bears the Creed and Lord's Prayer and contains some ancient carving that may have come from a rood screen.

Some seats and bench ends are antique and carved with linen-fold moulding; some of the wall panelling is of Jacobean style. Panelling on the north wall is 16th century and may well have been taken from the parish church of Dunkswell, in ruins at the time, but later restored (about 1817) by the Simcoe family. Three painted hatchments grace the walls and bear the arms of the families Simcoe and Gwillim, the latter being Mrs. Simcoe's family name. Prominent in each is the lion rampant.

The ornamental wrought-iron light brackets are of recent manufacture, representing Ontario's floral emblem, the trillium.

The John Graves Simcoe Memorial Foundation

The John Graves Simcoe Memorial Foundation was established in 1965. Its purposes were set forth in an incorporating Act passed by the legislature of Ontario.

The first achievement of the Foundation was the rehabilitation and preservation of Simcoe's burial place, historic Wolford Chapel in Devonshire.

Much of the credit for the chapel's present day accessibility to the public belongs to Sir Geoffrey Harmsworth, the distinguished British publisher, who presented it to the people of Canada.

Wolford Chapel was designated as Ontario property at a handing-over ceremony held at the Devonshire site on September 27, 1966. The Hon. John P. Robarts, then Premier of Ontario, accepted the deed to the property from Sir Geoffrey Harmsworth. At the same ceremony, Mr. A. G. Le Marchant of Honiton, Devonshire, owner of the former Simcoe estate, presented Mr Robarts with the deed for the right-of-way to the chapel.

Canadians are enriched by these warm-hearted and generous gifts.

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The Story of
John Graves Simcoe
First Lieutenant-Governor
of Upper Canada
and
Wolford Chapel
near Honiton, Devonshire

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